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24 June 1985

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence
Deputy Director of Central Intelligence
Deputy Director for Intelligence

FROM: DDI Working Group on TWA Hijacking

SUBJECT: Evidence of State Involvement in Hijacking

We do not believe that Iran, Syria, or Libya was involved in planning or conducting the hijacking of TWA flight 847. Available evidence indicates the hijacking began on 14 June as an independent operation by disgruntled Shias from southern Lebanon, and later was taken over by elements of the two principal Lebanese Shia organizations--Amal and Hizballah.

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Syria, on the other hand, has little to gain from a prolonged hostage crisis, and is unlikely to encourage one. Syrian President Assad almost certainly prefers a peaceful, relatively quick resolution to the crisis and is likely to urge Amal leader Nabih Barri and Iranian officials to agree to a compromise agreement with the United States. Assad's influence, however, is limited, and he is not likely to take actions that would risk antagonizing his allies.

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Although Libya undoubtedly would like to play a role in a situation that places the United States in an embarrassing position, Libyan leader Qadhafi has few if any assets to bring to bear in the crisis. Moreover, Libya continues to be held in suspicion by Lebanese Shias and has failed in its efforts to forge a cooperative relationship with them.

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Iran

As in the hijacking of a Kuwaiti airliner to Tehran last December [redacted]

[redacted] Iran clearly supports the hijackers' objectives and would like to exploit the incident for its purposes. Unlike the Kuwaiti airliner hijacking, however, the TWA crisis provides Iran with a considerable opportunity to meddle with little apparent risk. Because the incident is unfolding in Beirut, and not Tehran, Iran cannot be held responsible for its outcome, and Iran can deny that it is meddling in the situation. [redacted]

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Iran has publicly denied allegations of complicity in the hijacking. Soon after the incident began, an Iranian spokesman claimed that Iran was being blamed for the attack in order to aggravate tensions in the region and to "pave the way" for the United States to carry out a military intervention. Until last weekend, in fact, Iranian officials refrained from making any public comments in support of the hijacking. During a visit to Libya and Syria, however, Consultative Assembly Speaker Rafsanjani--Iran's second most powerful political figure--made several statements generally supportive of the hijackers' goals:

- On 22 June Rafsanjani defended the hijacking as a valid means of obtaining the release of Lebanese Shias from Israeli prisons.
- On 24 June, Rafsanjani said that Iran in general does not "approve of any acts that terrorize innocent people, but we must also regard the Elysee Palace and the Pentagon as centers of terrorism." Rafsanjani asserted that Iran has no connections to the hijackers and that Iranian officials would not have approved of the hijacking had they known of it in advance.
- On 25 June, Rafsanjani publicly endorsed the hijackers' demands, saying that he believes the best way to end the crisis would be to release the Shias in Israel in exchange for the US hostages.

While Rafsanjani has gone on the offensive publicly to defend Iran's image in the hostage situation, we have seen no evidence that Tehran has decided to undertake serious efforts to bring the crisis to a conclusion. We believe that Tehran will continue to encourage its radical Shia allies to prolong the crisis. [redacted]

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Evidence suggests Iran would not have encouraged its clients to undertake the hijacking of a US airliner and that it has sought to avoid any implication of complicity in recent hijackings. Tehran also has been concerned about the increasingly independent terrorist operations that its Lebanese allies have carried out in recent months:

-- Various sources indicate Tehran has opposed hijackings since the Kuwaiti airliner incident last December.

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Rafsanjani met on 24 June with a number of Hizballah and radical Amal officials while he was in Damascus. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] We suspect Rafsanjani used the occasion to encourage the radical Shias to prolong the crisis and to refuse to compromise on their demands. [REDACTED]

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We believe that Tehran is decided to take advantage of an opportunity that was presented to it. Iranian officials probably calculated that the potential benefits to be gained from the current crisis far outweigh the risks. A prolonged crisis would serve a number of Iranian objectives, both in Lebanon and elsewhere:

-- By encouraging Hizballah to hold out for the most extreme demands, Iran can portray the radical Shias as the staunchest defender of Shia interests, and thus further undermine Barri's position in

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Lebanon's Shia community.

- A prolonged crisis also is likely to preclude Amal from undertaking, with Syrian support, an armed crackdown against Hizballah. Iranian officials recently expressed concern that Barri, with Damascus' blessing, would move to eliminate Hizballah once Amal completes its operations against the Palestinians in the Beirut area.
- A prolonged crisis also makes the United States appear impotent in the Middle East. Tehran may believe moderate Arab states will conclude that the United States offers them little protection from Iranian-inspired terrorism.
- Finally, a prolonged crisis in which the United States is unable to take effective action against radical Shias in Lebanon will encourage Iranian-inspired terrorists elsewhere to attack US interests. [REDACTED]

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Syria

Although Syria provides support and guidance to the Amal movement and probably sympathizes with the hijackers' demands for the release of the Shia prisoners in Israel, Damascus almost certainly was not involved in planning or staging the hijacking of TWA 847. Neither the initial attack nor a prolonged hostage crisis would benefit Syria. In fact, Syrian President Assad almost certainly sees the situation as an unwelcome complication of his efforts to stabilize the security situation in Lebanon and control developments there. We believe that Assad favors a peaceful resolution, but it is not clear how much, if any, capital he is willing to expend to achieve that end. [REDACTED]

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Early in the incident Assad asked Barri to become actively involved in negotiations, and Barri has said he will go to Damascus soon to discuss the hostage situation with Syrian officials.

- If Barri goes to Syria, we believe Assad will strongly urge that the hostages be released.
- Assad does not control Barri, however, and cannot force Amal to try to free the TWA passengers. Moreover, Assad undoubtedly knows Barri does not control the situation, and he is unlikely to do anything to undermine further the position of a key moderate Shia leader who is trying to prevent a fundamentalist revolution in Lebanon. [REDACTED]

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Syria has even less incentive to use the influence it may

have with the radical Shia elements involved in the hostage situation.

-- Syria, for instance, could restrict Hizballah activities in the Bekaa valley or disrupt Iranian resupply routes through Syria.

Although Syrian objectives in Lebanon, however, are incompatible with Hizballah's aim of establishing a fundamentalist, Iranian-style regime there and Syrian troops have periodically clashed with Shia extremists in the Bekaa valley, Damascus so far has not chosen to endanger its overall relationship with Iran by cracking down on Hizballah. In addition, a dramatic Syrian action against Hizballah could unleash a fundamentalist backlash against Damascus. [REDACTED]

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On 23 June, Assad met with an Iranian delegation headed by Rafsanjani. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] We suspect Assad urged that Tehran use its influence with the radical Shias to end the crisis. Here again, however, Assad's ability to secure cooperation is limited and he probably is not willing to risk his relationship with Iran to save the lives of American hostages. [REDACTED]

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Libya

[REDACTED] While Libyan leader Qadhafi would relish the opportunity to be involved in a situation that embarrasses the United States, he does not have any assets to bring to bear in this situation. [REDACTED]

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Libya is distrusted by Lebanese Shias across the religious spectrum because of its suspected involvement in the disappearance of the Imam Musa Sadr--the religious leader of Lebanon's Shias and founder of the Amal movement in the 1970s--during a visit to Tripoli in 1978. Since then, elements of Amal calling themselves the "Musa Sadr Brigade" have conducted numerous attacks against Libyan interests both in Lebanon and elsewhere. Relations have become further strained by the recent Amal-Palestinian fighting in Lebanon. Tripoli has publically defended the Palestinians in the conflict and tried to pressure Damascus into restraining the Amal. It is very unlikely that Amal elements involved in the hostage crisis would ask for any guidance or support from Libya, or accept any that was offered. [REDACTED]

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Tripoli probably will use the recently proclaimed Libyan-Iranian alliance to press for access to the Hizballah over the next year, but Qadhafi will be unable to exert significant influence on them independent of Tehran. For their part, the radical Shias are unlikely to be susceptible to Libyan efforts to

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become involved in their activities. They are unlikely to accept guidance or operational support from Qadhafi in their terrorist activities. [REDACTED]

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